



Help your teens have a graduation night to remember

By Sharon Foster and Michael Langer

Many teens are making plans for senior week and graduation. While these are fun and safe events for most, there is a higher risk for underage drinking. Parents and other adults can help keep teens safe by being informed and prepared.

Most students in Washington make healthy choices, but some are pressured to make alcohol part of their celebrations. Some teens may think of graduation night as a “rite-of-passage” event that should be celebrated with alcohol.

The good news is that two out of three high school seniors choose not to drink alcohol ([2012 Washington State Healthy Youth Survey](#)). It is important parents and other adults recognize teens for the healthy choices they are making, and reinforce how good choices will help them now and in the future.

It’s also important to make a plan with your teen for what he or she will do in a risky situation, such as attending a party where there is alcohol. Let your teen children know they can call you any time for a safe ride home, no questions asked, if an unsafe situation develops. Remind them to never, under any circumstances, get in a car if the driver has been drinking. Their safety is the top priority.

To help your teen have a safe, fun and memorable graduation night:

- Remember that you are the primary influence on your teen.
- Set clear rules about not drinking, and enforce consequences for breaking them.
- Offer to plan, host, and supervise a graduation party; assure parents the party will be alcohol-free.
- Talk to other parents about post-event activities to make sure alcohol won’t be present.

Alcohol has taken more young lives than tobacco and illicit drugs combined. Teens need to know there are also other risks that go along with underage drinking. Alcohol is especially harmful to the developing teen brain. Alcohol can damage learning, memory, and impulse control. Teens won’t want to remember graduation as the night they got pregnant or infected with a sexually transmitted disease, started a fight, or crashed their car. Parents won’t want to remember this as the night they were arrested for giving alcohol to teens, followed by a year in jail and a \$5,000 fine.

We all want our teens to stay safe as they celebrate the final days of their high school career, yet only 29% of 12th graders say their parents talk to them about underage drinking. Talk to them now - they need the facts. To learn how, visit www.StartTalkingNow.org.

Sharon Foster is chair of the Washington State Liquor Control Board. Michael Langer is the Prevention and Treatment Services Supervisor for the DSHS Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery. Both Foster and Langer are co-chairs of the Washington State Coalition to Reduce Underage Drinking (RUaD).